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ABSTRACT

A microcounseling approach was used to conduct a study of an experimental training program. The objective was to train naive college students, who were interested in counseling, to assess clients' attitudes toward guidance tests. A correlation of .797 was obtained between clients' ratings of attitudes toward tests and the trainees' ratings of clients' attitudes toward tests. Findings were consistent with the results of other microcounseling studies. Individual differences among the trainees were noted and comparisons were made between trainees' own ratings, judges' ratings, and clients' ratings of trainees. The effect of supervisors using extensive positive verbal reinforcement was discussed. (Author)

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MICROCOUNSELING: CLIENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD TESTS

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Recent work by Tiedeman and others (1967) has stressed that there is not a simple straight line relationship between facts that are to be known and facts as they are perceived and known by the individual. In counseling it is important to understand the mediation of facts and information by individuals. In order for counselors to help a client understand and use information from the results of standardized tests, they must be sensitive to factors which influence the mediation of the test information presented to the client. The client's attitude towards standardized tests is one client variable which influences the mediation of test information. It can then be assumed that a counselor's ability to accurately assess the client's attitudes towards tests is important in understanding the client's mediation offthe test information. The purpose of this study was to apply the microcounseling model (Ivey, et al., 1968) in developing an experimental training program for teaching counselors how to accurately assess client's attutides towards standardized tests.

Microcounseling (Ivey, et al., 1968) has been defined as a scaled-down sample of counseling which is limited to brief five minute counseling sessions which are recorded on videotape and immediately played back to maximize the benefits from practice. The sessions are realistic encounters which have been designed to focus on specific aspects of counseling that can be identified, described

and practiced under somewhat controlled conditions prior to practicum experiences. The microcounseling model also provides a framework for making explicit various assumptions underlying counseling practice and the training of counselors. The model may be used to simultaneously study and evaluate training outcomes, counselor-client interactions, counseling processes, counselor effectiveness and client satisfaction with counseling.

A major objective of the study was to provide brief and intensive training for inexperienced counselors to determine if they could assess client's attitudes toward guidance tests. Programmed materials were written to cue the trainee to focus on the client's feelings and attitudes toward tests. During training the use of videotape models and playback focused upon the assessment of attitudes by (1) staying on the topic of guidance tests, (2) attending, and (3) reflecting and summarizing the affective components of client's statements about tests (Ivey, et al., 1968). The study focuses only upon training naive counselors to assess attitudes. It does not deal with testing the assumption that effective use of test related information is partially dependent upon the counselor being able to assess the client's attitudes towards tests.

Method

Subjects. Twelve psychology and sociology majors at Colorado State University, Fort Collins, served as trainees or Ss in this

experiment. These Ss (seniors and graduate students) had no previous counseling experience, and could be considered naive Ss. The "clients" were 24 paid volunteer students from Colorado State University, who were randomly assigned to counselors. These "clients" had responded to a "Help Wanted" ad, requesting volunteers for a study of attitudes toward psychological tests.

Microcounseling training model. Each S participated in the following training procedure: (a) An initial interview was videotaped (with only the first 10 minutes of the interview being recorded) in which the S was instructed to "Assess the client's attitudes toward psychological tests." The client was told that "You will be interviewed by a beginning counselor; this will be a short interview." This initial session served to establish a base line of interview performance for the trainee, and allowed the trainee to become accustomed to the videotape equipment and recording room. (b) The trainee next read and completed programmed material which was discussed with a supervisor. In the programmed text the emphasis was upon maintaining focus, and upon skills of attending behavior, and reflection and summarisation of feeling (Ivey, et al., 1968) as these apply in the assessment of client attitudes toward tests. (c) A 7-minute video model, contrasting a counselor's ineffective and effective assessment of student attitudes toward psychological tests was presented, coupled with discussion of the model by trainee and supervisor. (d) The trainee was shown his initial interview,

and was asked to identify instances of attending, reflecting, and summarizing feeling about tests, or instances where these skills might have been used in assessing the client's attitudes toward tests. Use of the skills was reinforced by the supervisor, through such comments as, "Yes, that's it!" (e) The trainee was instructed to interview client 1 again to "Assess the client's attitudes toward psychological tests." Only the first 10 minutes of the second interview were video-recorded. (f) The trainee and supervisor viewed the tape and engaged in further analysis of the trainee's use of the skills of attending and reflecting and summarizing feeling in the assessment of attitudes toward tests. Verbal reinforcement for attempts to use the skills was provided by the supervisor. (g) After a one-week time interval, the trainee returned for the second half of the training. Each trainee was interviewed by an experienced counselor, who assessed the trainee's attitudes toward psychological tests. Ten to 15 minutes of this session were videotaped. (h) Trainee, experienced counselor, and supervisor viewed and discussed the videotape, with emphasis again being upon the use of the skills of attending, reflecting, and summarizing feeling during the assessment of attitudes toward tests. (i) The trainee interviewed another client after being instructed to "Assess the client's attitudes toward psychological tests." Instructions given to the second client were identical to those given the first client seen the week before. Ten minutes of the interview were recorded.

(j) The tape was reviewed by trainee and supervisor, with reinforcement for effective use of skills again being provided by the supervisor. (k) The trainee interviewed the experienced counselor, after being instructed to "Assess the counselor's attitudes toward psychological tests." Ten minutes of the session were video-recorded. (l) Trainee, experienced counselor, and supervisor viewed and discussed the session. (m) The trainee interviewed the second client again after being instructed to "Assess the client's attitudes toward psychological tests." Instructions given to the client were identical to those given for the previous interviews. Ten minutes of the session were recorded. (n) Trainee and supervisor discussed the final tape. The entire procedure for each trainee was completed in two, two-hour time blocks, with one week intervening between sessions.

Instrumentation and scoring of dependent variables. Four techniques of evaluation were utilized in the study. The Ss' videotaped interviews were arranged in random order and rated by two external judges on a rating scale adapted from Truax and Carkhuff (1967), and Ivey, et al., (1968) for accurate assessment of attitudes toward tests. Interjudge reliability was computed for the two judges and yielded a Rho coefficient of .59.

At the conclusion of each of the training sessions the client rated his counselor trainee on a semantic differential scale, the Counselor Effectiveness Scale (Ivey, Miller, Morrill, and Normington, 1967), and also rated the counselor trainee on a relationship questionnaire adapted

from Truax and Carkhuff (1967). Scales presented to clients were administered in counterbalanced order.

The counselor trainee rated himself on the rating scale used by the judges for accurate assessment of attitudes toward tests at the conclusion of each of the four interviews. Trends over four trials were analyzed for all of the above criterion measures.

Immediately following completion of the last interview, an attitude scale toward guidance tests was completed by the client and the same scale was completed by the counselor trainee, as to how he would infer the client would respond on the attitude scale. A Pearson product moment correlation between client attitude score and counselor trainee predictions as to client attitude scores was computed.

Results

There was a significant correlation between client scores on a scale designed to measure attitudes towards tests and counselor trainees' ratings of these clients' attitudes towards tests. ($r = .797$ with 24 pair of ratings, $p < .022$). Table 1 reveals a significant

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Insert Table 1 about here

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increase over trials in external judges' ratings of counselor ability to accurately assess client's attitude toward tests. Based on the judge's ratings, there was also a significant difference among trainees

as to their ability to accurately assess client's attitudes toward tests. The reader should keep in mind that the low correlation between judge's ratings seriously limits the significance of these results.

The trend analysis of the trainee's own ratings of their ability to accurately assess client's attitudes toward tests is presented in Table 2. There was a significant difference among the trial means,

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Insert Table 2 about here

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and the linear component was significant. In the one-week interval between trials 2 and 3, the trainees lowered their rating of their ability to accurately assess client attitudes toward tests. The trial 3 rating did not regress to the level of trial 1, however, and the rating of trial 4 was almost double that of trial 1. This indicates a significant increase in the trainees' ratings of their ability to accurately assess client attitudes toward tests. It should be noted that external judges' ratings of the counselor's ability to assess client's attitude toward tests also dropped slightly from trial 2 to trial 3; however, this drop was not nearly as great as that of the counselor's self-rating.

Table 3 presents a trend analysis of the client's ratings of the counselors' ability to establish and maintain relationships. The

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Insert table 3 about here

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important finding is the significant difference among trainees in client ratings of the counseling relationship. Although the establishment of the client-counselor relationship was not a major objective of this study, the mean relationship scores compared favorably with those reported in previous studies (Ivey, et al., 1968). In the present study, the relationship scores did not differ over trials. The rank order correlation between two clients' ratings of the same counselor was .587 ($p < .05$).

Table 4 presents a trend analysis of counselor effectiveness as rated by the client. Although the ratings tended to increase over trials, this increase was not significant.

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Insert Table 4 about here

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Discussion

The trainees were able to assess their clients' attitudes toward guidance tests. Whether or not this is important in the mediation of the test information presented by a counselor to a client cannot be inferred from this study. Since the phenomenon of Ss being able to assess attitudes was evident, we tentatively assume that the microcounseling training did in fact contribute to the occurrence of Ss behavior.

Results of other microcounseling studies are consistent with findings reported in this study in that brief intensive practice

sessions and immediate feedback tends to bring about marked changes in selected aspects of the behavior exhibited by many of the trainees. However, observation of the Ss in training led us to believe that Ss must exercise control and selectively attend to the objective of assessing attitudes, otherwise the topic would change due partly to trainees' and clients' lack of interest in attitudes toward tests. In the use of microcounseling procedures, we assume that the techniques used to assess attitudes toward tests could be applied in assessing attitudes toward countless psychological objects and that it would not be necessary to train Ss to assess a number of specific attitudes held by clients. The ultimate objective in assessing attitudes toward tests was to become sensitive and aware of client attitudes which might influence the mediation of test information made available to the client.

The results of the study provide support for the combining of skills as part of the microcounseling model. Combining of skills required longer interviews (10 to 20 minutes) in order to obtain the desired practice. Hopefully had Ss been trained on the separate skills before combining skills they would have been even more successful in assessing clients' attitudes. However, the assessment of clients' attitudes toward tests may be a comparatively simple task and the results of the study may be due to the simplicity of the task. Additional studies will be required before a more definitive explanation can evolve.

Judges' ratings offer support for the training procedures and outcomes of this study as there were significant improvements in the

trainee's performance in selective attending to the affective aspects of Ss comments about tests. Equally important, it may be observed that the training level achieved during the first session carried over one week and trainees were able to perform at an equally high level despite the lapse in training. However, it may be observed that the additional training in the form of micro-therapy did not improve trainee performance. This may be attributed to inadequate design of micro-therapy or to perhaps the inadvisability of this technique.

The marked increase in the Ss own ratings of ability to accurately assess clients' attitudes toward tests may be simply the result of supervisors' extensive use of positive verbal reinforcers of the S attempts to respond in a way which was consistent with the objectives of the training. There was considerable variation among Ss own ratings of their ability to assess clients' attitudes.

A comparison of the means of the judges' ratings and the trainees' self ratings reveals an interesting pattern. Judges' mean ratings are higher on the first set of interviews than the trainees' mean rating, the mean ratings are almost identical for the second set of interviews, judges' mean ratings are again higher than the trainees' mean ratings on the third interview, and trainees' mean ratings are higher than the judges' on only the fourth set of interviews.

Mean ratings fail to reveal the significant aspects of the individual comparisons between trainees' self ratings and judges' ratings. For example, the trainee given the highest ratings by the judges and high

ratings by clients rated herself below the average of the trainees' self ratings on two of the four interviews and about the average on the other two interviews. The trainee given the lowest ratings by the judges was also given low ratings by both clients but his self ratings were about at the average of all of the trainees' self ratings. These descrepancies among the trainee's, judges' and clients' ratings are critical in terms of the source of feedback given to trainees and the impact of feedback upon the acquisition of skills and future performance. The important implication is that in training we need to be able to better assess the source and kinds of feedback that are most helpful in modifying trainee's behaviors. A microcounseling model enables supervisors to experimentally study the important aspects of feedback upon the acquisition of skills.

Microcounseling procedures offer a distinct challenge in supervision because of the opportunity for immediate and specific feedback via videotape and extensive use of reinforcers in shaping Ss behavior. Inter-subject ratings would have been interesting and informative. Having Ss rate each other might contribute to their own understanding and acquisition of the specific skills along with providing additional information as to the validity of each Ss own self rating as viewed by peers, judges and clients.

The findings of the ability to establish and maintain relationships was somewhat surprising due to the content of the interview. The ratings did not change significantly over time, and no attempt was made to assist the Ss in any way by concentrating on the relationship which

was in fact never mentioned. Differences among trainees was significant and was consistent with the results of other microcounseling studies. Trainees differed greatly in terms of their ability to understand and attempt to apply specific techniques in assessing attitudes. Those trainees who received the lowest ratings could be identified and trained on other microcounseling skills and then retrained in assessing attitudes. Microcounseling procedures offer numerous alternatives in working with individual trainees and without risk of endangering real clients. However, there is no reason to assume that with microcounseling techniques everyone can be trained to be a highly effective counselor.

Choice of client for beginning counselors may be critical in providing trainees with the kind of experiences viewed as being helpful in their acquiring certain skills and attitudes. The microcounseling model provides a way of identifying and studying client responses. Client variability has been evident in all of the microcounseling studies which have been reported. The small amount of data on client response and ratings based on short counseling interviews pose an interesting question as to what constitutes effectiveness in establishing relationships. Perhaps effectiveness and establishing relationships are not as "fragile" as believed and that sensitivity on the part of the counselor is not as critical as matching certain clients with certain counselors.

The important implications of the study are that a group of naive Ss labeled beginning counselors were able to accurately assess clients'

attitudes towards guidance tests, and that the microcounseling model provides a unique frame of reference for studying training outcomes, training procedures and in gaining insight into both training and counseling processes. Furthermore, microcounseling may eventually provide a model for training large numbers of individuals requiring varying degrees of competence in counseling relationships without the added risks of potential harm to real clients.

Footnote

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Table 1

Trend Analysis of Mean External Judges' Rating of Counselor's Ability to Accurately Assess Client's Attitude Toward Tests

Source	df	MS	f	Trial Means 1	2	3	4
Trials (A)	3	37.85	5.42**	9.21	12.54	12.38	13.17
Subjects (B)	11	21.63	3.09**				
A X B	33	6.99					
Total	47						
Linear Component	1	66.47	8.51**				

** $p < .01$

Table 2

Trend Analysis of Counselor's Own Rating of Ability to Accurately Assess Client's Attitude Toward Tests

Source	df	MS	f	Trial Means 1	2	3	4
Trials (A)	3	109.14	26.36***	7.58	12.50	9.91	14.50
Subjects (B)	11	12.30	2.97**				
A X B	33	4.14					
Total	47						
Linear Component	1	125.58					

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

Table 3

Trend Analysis of Clients' Ratings of Counselor's Ability to Establish and Maintain Relationship

Source	df	MS	f	Trial Means 1	2	3	4
Trials (A)	3	16.14	1.23	23.08	21.67	21.50	23.92
Subjects (B)	11	57.13	4.35**				
A X B	33	13.12					
Total	47						
Linear Component	1	36.39	5.58*				

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Table 4

Trend Analysis of Counselor Effectiveness

as Rated by the Client

Source	df	MS	f	Trial Means 1	2	3	4
Trials (A)	3	95.45	.48	133.67	133.92	138.92	139.25
Subjects (B)	11	670.08	3.42**				
A X B	33	195.75					
Total	47						
Linear Component	1	961.28	3.91				

** $p < .01$